

Sweden

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Freedom of the Press

Sweden has strong legal protections for the press under the Freedom of the Press Law dating back to 1766, as well as the 1991 Fundamental Law of Freedom of Expression. However, these laws criminalize expression considered to be hate speech and prohibit threats or expressions of contempt directed against a group or member of a group. While freedom of the press in general is greatly valued, there is considerable debate in the Swedish media on the limits of free speech regarding the issue of immigration and Islam. While immigration skeptic blogs and the right wing nationalist Sweden Democrats party decry what they see as self-censorship in the Swedish press, most of the mainstream media see criticizing immigration as a form of hate speech. In June 2013, the government made it possible for police to access IP addresses in order to identify when online hate crimes have occurred, and granted the Swedish Media Council SEK 1 million (\$152,000) for initiatives to combat online xenophobia, sexism, and similar forms of intolerance among youth.

The penal code criminalizes defamation, which may result in prison sentences of up to two years. The Justice Department began considering making online defamation a crime in January 2013 after recommendations from the Swedish Data Inspection Board, but this initiative was still under review at year's end. In November 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that the editors of Swedish newspapers are personally accountable for all articles published on the newspaper's website (including those filed in archives), making the editors legally responsible for articles approved by their predecessors. The ruling was criticized by the press. In June, Fredrik Vejdeland, an editor of Nordfront, a website for the extremist Swedish Resistance Movement, had been sentenced to pay a fine for both a racist post and a reader's comment. In December, the attorney general decided to prosecute Vejdeland for almost 30 racist and hate speech comments readers had left on the website. In 2012, the previous editor of Nordfront, Emil Hagberg, had been sentenced a month in jail for a user comment portraying Jews as capitalist parasites and threatening them with the gallows.

Several other legislative initiatives and cases during the year also raised concern. In February 2013 a court of appeals upheld the 2012 verdict against the editor in chief and a news editor of the tabloid *Expressen*; they were fined up to SEK 30,000 (\$4,560) for inciting a journalist to purchase illegal firearms as part of a story on the ease of obtaining such weapons in Malmö. Leading journalists saw the case as government harassment and a blow to investigative reporting. In July, a new law was ratified regulating the use of publicly taken photos aimed at safeguarding the integrity of private citizens. The law was criticized for potentially hindering the job of press photographers.

The self-regulatory Swedish Press Council was established in 1916 and has jurisdiction over print and online content. It consists of a judicial board as well as industry and independent members. Complaints are investigated by an appointed ombudsman who can choose to dismiss them for lack of merit or forward them to the council with a recommendation to uphold. The council ultimately rules on complaints and can impose a tiered administrative fee, often referred to as a fine, of up to 30,000 kroners. Although the council does not have authority over broadcast media, it does operate an ethical code across all platforms. The code is applied to broadcast media by the Swedish Radio and Television Authority.

Journalists' sources are protected, as is access to information for all citizens, under the Freedom of the Press Law. Physical threats and harassment directed at the press is generally not an issue, and no cases

were reported in 2013.

Buoyed by a high level of readership, Sweden's newspaper market is very diverse, with many local and regional papers, even though it is threatened by dwindling advertising. The government offers subsidies to newspapers regardless of political affiliation in order to encourage competition, and media content in immigrant languages is supported by the state. Public broadcasting has a strong presence in Sweden, consisting of Sveriges Television (SVT) and Sveriges Radio (SR). Public television and radio are funded through a license fee, but there are more than 100 private radio stations, and television has considerable competition from private stations, with the main competitor being TV4. Private broadcasting ownership is highly concentrated under the media companies Bonnier and the Modern Times Group.

Access to the internet is unrestricted by the government, and the medium was used by about 94 percent of the population in 2013. Since February 2013, every household that has a personal computer or smartphone connected to the internet had been required by law to pay a TV-license fee of SEK 2,076 (\$315).

2014 Scores

Press Status

Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

10

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

2

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

4

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

4